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SUBJECT: KABILA REPLACES KISEMPIA AS CHIEF OF CONGOLESE
DEFENSE FORCES

¶1. (U) Congolese military (FARDC) and Ministry of Defense officials confirmed June 13 that President Joseph Kabila has replaced FARDC Chief of Defense Forces General Kiseopia Sungilanga Lombe with General Dieudonne Kayembe Mbandankulu, effectively immediately. Kabila made the announcement overnight June 12-13 after presiding over a meeting of the High Defense Council, immediately before departing on a multi-day visit to South Africa.

¶2. (SBU) Kayembe, believed to be in his mid-50s, has been serving as an officer without function with the FARDC since ¶2003. His last official posting was a brief tour as director general of military intelligence (DEMIAP). A native of Kananga, Western Kasai, Kayembe was raised in Katanga and received military training in France at Saint-Cyr. A former officer with the Armed Forces of Zaire (FAZ), he later became a close and important military adviser to Laurent Kabila. Kayembe was Vice Minister of Defense in 2001 when Kabila was assassinated. He was named later that year as deputy chief of staff of the army.

¶3. (SBU) Kabila also announced that FARDC Air Forces Commander General John Numbi was moving to the position of Police Inspector General, the highest-ranking police position. Numbi has served as Air Forces Commander since ¶2001. Born in Katanga province, he went on to become the operational commander of Laurent Kabila's forces in Maniema in 1998, and was later named regional military commander for Kabila in Katanga in 1999. Several human rights organizations have accused him of committing violations during his military career. He will replace General Daniel Katsuba, who had held the position since April 2002, after having served as an adviser to Laurent Kabila and an officer in the FAZ. General Rigobert Masamba Musungu will take over as Air Forces Commander.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Kiseopia's long-anticipated departure is welcome as he was viewed by many as a major obstacle to military reform efforts. Numbi had been mentioned as a possible replacement for Kiseopia, but there are many reasons why he would have been a controversial choice. The appointment as Police Inspector General, however, shows that Numbi remains a powerful figure. Further reporting on these changes will follow septel. End comment.

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